

Testimony on HB 7192

I write to urge you to oppose all school regionalization bills including HB 7192. By establishing a Commission whose purpose is to develop a plan for the redistricting or consolidation of school services, the wording of this bill eventually makes regionalization accomplished by default. The bill is ambiguous as to who ultimately will decide on and be accountable to what gets implemented. The long-term study of this commission also seems to be designed to fly under the radar of Connecticut's citizens by drawing the process out over 8 years. Most importantly, major stakeholders are missing from this commission. This commission makes no effort to draw in more of the best and the brightest of our state education system, the town leaders, superintendents, principals and teachers who are working every day to make their districts more cost effective while improving educational outcomes. This bill will only weaken what is probably the only bright spot drawing people to Connecticut right now, our education system.

While all of us must support cost savings, both in education and all other areas of state spending, school regionalization overall shows no such savings. Many towns already are successfully pursuing cost-sharing alternatives where it makes sense, as towns are looking for innovative ways to reduce expenses to shore up economic viability. The state of course can encourage this, but to force regionalization via a Commission is not the way to do it. Do we need work on elevating districts who are not providing the education for their students? Certainly. Some districts may need more help fiscally and in developing plans to improve their educational outcomes, but many local communities are running fiscally responsible districts with the educational results to prove it. I ask you to listen to the districts. We need more of this across Connecticut and that is what the State can encourage and facilitate.

I am a parent of one current and one graduated public school student, an active PTA member for 15 years, and have been president of the high school PTSA for three years with two previous years at our middle school. I know our town's education budget and how every single line item is looked at with the questions of how can we be more effective in how we spend our money and where can we capture efficiencies with our town and neighboring towns. One larger movement now has been to develop the Community Steps program to educate and train our 18-21 year old students with special needs. The advantages of this program not only include capturing enormous cost savings, but now the families have their young adults living, learning and working in their local environment. Plans to establish an Alternative High School to fit the needs of current middle and high school students rather than sending them out of district are under way for next year. I know our administrators work diligently to provide a system that supports our students and community. Everyone works together as a town to justify every single tax dollar requested from our residents in order to produce a fiscally sound budget that ensures a strong education system for our students. We do this without being forced to by an oversight committee from the state. We need more of this across Connecticut, not a plan that will decimate what actually produces high educational outcomes.

Connecticut's residents have already been hit hard by the changes in federal tax law. Our taxes as residents of a blue state have risen significantly. We need to tackle the underlying problems causing our financial problems and leave our education system intact and sound. Locally controlled education, run by people who students and parents can reach out to and work with, is at the core of this system.

I urge you to oppose any bill that opens the door to forced regionalization of Connecticut Public Schools.

Thank you for your attention,

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